Two weeks ago 18 Choice Literacy contributors gathered in Portland, Oregon, for a weekend writing retreat. As part of the retreat, we also took in eight live musicals. Now, you might wonder how we had any time left to write after cramming in all those musicals. It was easy. The musicals were all included in the 4X4 = 8 show. Eight musicals were presented one after another, each no longer than 10 minutes, all enacted on a 4-by-4 foot square stage.

We were treated to a murder mystery with the actors' British accents rivaling those on Downton Abbey, which ended with six people jammed improbably onto that tiny space in the "drawing room."  The consensus favorite for our group involved a couple in therapy trying to get through a road trip without killing each other. We also enjoyed the enactment of a backstage crew drama from a rock concert, and the angst of two teens caught in a closet during an awkward game of spin the bottle.

Reducing the time and space for any task can expand the possibilities for getting the work done. High school teacher Ellie Gilbert was in our group, and she was immediately inspired to have her students create stories on 4-by-4 inch post-its. "Full stories, beginning, middle, and end -- and if it's horrible, it's done quickly and easy enough to discard," she explained.

"I can do almost anything for a minute,"  counselor Darla Breckenridge says, and I use those words as a mantra when I don't feel like getting through an entire exercise routine or editing a lengthy writing draft.  What big task are you dreading today? Is there a small chunk you can bite off -- just ten minutes of work toward the goal so you can move forward before you set it aside for another day? Can you do one minuscule piece of the project in 60 seconds? We're always being told we need to think big, but a fun evening out with Choice Literacy writers has got me savoring the power of small things.